



Community Development Department

News Release

WisDOT awards St. Croix County \$120,000 TAP grant for Bike & Pedestrian Plan

For Immediate Release: August 5, 2014

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St. Croix County has been notified by Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Secretary, Mark Gottlieb, that the county's \$120,000 Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grant application to fund a comprehensive county-wide bike and pedestrian plan has been approved. This highly competitive grant program provides an 80% grant with a 20% local cash match. The completion of this comprehensive plan will position the county and its municipalities with the tools necessary to apply for future TAP infrastructure implementation funds for trail design, right-of-way acquisition, and trail construction,

This project has been identified within numerous local plans including the County's Comprehensive Plan. Never has there been a more crucial time for the plan to be created and implemented than during the current construction of the \$650 million St. Croix River Crossing Bridge Project. The St. Croix River Crossing will provide a safer, more reliable river crossing that includes a four-lane river bridge, new roadway approaches on both sides of the river, historic and environmental mitigation, and the conversion of the existing Historical Stillwater Lift Bridge to a bike and pedestrian facility, currently known as the "Loop Trail." County Administrator, Pat Thompson, states, "This important community-driven project aligns with the current construction of the St. Croix River Crossing Bridge and the county's strategic initiatives of Growth Management and Continuous Improvement. This is a great opportunity for the county to create a consistent county-wide comprehensive bike and pedestrian plan that identifies alternatives to automotive travel, increases economic and tourism opportunities, and promotes healthy recreation."

St. Croix County needs a comprehensive bike and trails plan and vision in order to cohesively combine the recreational elements of the St. Croix County Parks and Recreation Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan as well as the long-range transportation elements of St. Croix County's Highway Department Bicycle Transportation Plan 1995-2015. Several municipalities within St. Croix County have developed bicycle plans or have adopted plans that reference bicycle planning in some capacity. The presence of these existing plans creates a large number of proposed facilities that are not connected. A single plan creating a countywide multi-modal transportation network will synthesize local plans, and contain specific recommendations to increase infrastructure with an eye toward regional integration and connectivity to the Loop Trail and Interstate 94 Bridge. The plan will forecast new or replacement

trips, new or replacement utilitarian trips, and identify the location and length of possible infrastructure corridors. The plan will also prioritize and detail education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation, and engineering projects to promote and increase bicycling as a viable alternative mode of transportation within St. Croix County and the region.

The immense enthusiasm, potential, existing tools, and urgency surrounding this project has led to a widely-attended, citizen created, grassroots organization known as the St. Croix Bike and Pedestrian Trail Coalition. The Coalition is dedicated to creating a coordinated bike and pedestrian trail network in St. Croix County, while also creating links to existing and planned bicycle facilities in adjacent counties in Wisconsin and Minnesota that extend the states multi-modal transportation network.

According to Community Development Director Ellen Denzer, “the trail being constructed as a part of the St. Croix River Crossing Project provides an opportunity for northwestern Wisconsin to create connections to a regional trail system serving the entire St. Croix River Valley basin. The Loop Trail’s location on the St. Croix River bluffs in St. Croix County give our department a unique opportunity to bring together local, county, state and federal governmental organizations along with various bicycle and service organizations to produce a well thought out, carefully detailed plan that will serve as the guide for future trail expansion over the next 15 years.”

St. Croix County Community Development will be selecting and working with a qualified consultant. Preparation of the plan will take approximately two years, with a completion date in 2016. Denzer emphasized that “continued extensive municipal and public input will be critical for the creation of a widely-accepted coordinated bike and pedestrian trail network within the county.”

In this planning process, there are several areas close to the Loop Trail that are of particular interest. First, a trail connection between the Historic Stillwater Lift Bridge and the Interstate 94 Bridge in Hudson has been a desire of local planners for a number of decades. The Loop Trail provides a safe, user friendly path across the Lift Bridge into Wisconsin and then generally parallels the new State Highway 64 as it moves south and crosses back into Minnesota. This Wisconsin portion of the Loop Trail provides an excellent northern phase for the connection to the I-94 Bridge and its trail accommodation. The City of Hudson has an already existing trail system through its Lake Front Park to the I-94 Bridge. The Hudson trail accommodations provide a solid southern phase of the connection between the two iconic bridges. Joining the northern and southern phases between the two bridges then becomes one of the significant areas for discussion as this plan is created.

A second important connection in close proximity to the Loop Trail is Willow River State Park. Containing almost 3000 acres of prairie oak savannah, forests and expansive river way scenery, this park will be a welcome destination for trail users to enjoy the variety of recreational opportunities available in the park. In addition, there are discussions underway to increase the trail facilities within the park over the next several years to provide more biking opportunities for park visitors. A third important connection corridor that has been considered for a number of years is the connection between the City of Hudson and the City of New Richmond, the county’s two largest cities.

While the momentum for trails has an immediate focus on areas of the county closest to the Loop Trail, the plan will be county-wide encompassing communities in the entire county and considering connections to trails, both existing and future, in the bordering counties of Pierce, Polk and Dunn to extend the state multi-modal transportation network. Other desirable possibilities for links to county amenities include connecting to the City of River Falls, a bike friendly community; to Kinnickinnic

State Park in Pierce County; to the St. Croix County Parks – Homestead, Glen Hills and Troy Beach; and to a trail that will eventually come from Interstate Park in Polk County.

Information is also available by contacting the Community Development Department at: 715-386-4680, or email at: cdd@co.saint-croix.wi.us.